BOOK I OF III

STARLIN

♦ HOWARD CHAYKIN ♦ JOSÉ LUIS GARCIA LOPÉZ ♦
STEVE OLIFF

I can remember my grandfather, bitching and moaning about how hard life was in the late 20th. Forget about it. What with World Wars III and IV to get it off to a rocking start, the 21st had it beat by lightyears. The wars smeared all the old national boundaries in its half-lifed wake, leaving behind a world of test-tube babies, incubator births or clones. And don't give me any of that "It's a small world after all" crapola—I've been around.

The powers that used to be built the new man out of anything they could find, like a *Wizard of Oz*-man with an assembly line. They gave the Scarecrows Brains, the Robots Hearts—and gave the cerebrally enhanced Lions, Tigers, and Bears opposable thumbs—and trigger fingers.

This new man was of heroic stock, certainly, but somehow twisted, molded by new codes both moral and genetic, recklessly confronting the known universe head on—ferociously convinced of humanity's Manifest Destiny beyond Earth.

But you can forget all about the Yellow Brick Road. What lay ahead was a cosmic trail of sweat, blood and tears, and somehow I ended up riding shotgun to the stars.

From *The Oral Diaries of Homer Glint*

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♦ TWILIGHT ♦

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TWILIGHT, BOOK ONE OF THREE.
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PRINTED IN CANADA. FIRST PRINTING.

PUBLICATION DESIGN BY DALE CRAIN

DC COMICS INC. 666 FIFTH AVE.
NEW YORK NY 10103
A WARNER BROS. INC. COMPANY

TWILIGHT

BOOK I

LAST FRONTIER

HERE KITTY-KITTY-- NICE KITTY...

...THAT'S RIGHT, F'TATATITA...

MRRROWWWWRRRRRRR...

...JUST KEEP PURRING, YOU LITTLE FOUR-LEGGED PRICK...

...'CAUSE WHEN I GET MY HANDS ON YOU--

Spa-

--YOU ARE TWENTY POUNDS OF USED CAT.

THAT'S RIGHT, YOU WALKING RAT'S NEST--

pinning

MRRROW

--I COULD HAVE GONE IN FOR OCULAR IMPLANTS--

--OR GOTTEN A ROBOT SEEING-EYE--

pinn

BUT NOOOO! I HAD TO DEPEND ON A TREACHEROUS FELINE FOR MY SUBSTITUTE RETINA--

GOTCHA!

OWWWFF! URRNGGK!

SHIT.

I'M JUST TOO OLD FOR THIS... TOO DAMNED OLD.

MRRRROWWWWRRR...

Spa- pinnngg pinng

THEY SAY AFTER THE FIRST FEW HUNDRED YEARS OR SO, YOU STOP TALKING TO YOURSELF...

...I GUESS I'LL ALWAYS BE IMMATURE-- NO MATTER HOW OLD I GET...

MMM

OWWRR

spa

pinngg...

THAT'S RIGHT, YOU LITTLE CRIPPLE--

--WHEN YOU'RE QUITE THROUGH PLAYING WITH MY STICKER, JUST LET ME KNOW--

--SO I CAN WASH IT AND SEE THROUGH THOSE BEADY EYES OF YOURS AGAIN--

MRRROWWWRRR

THAT'S RIGHT--WE'RE BOTH TOO OLD FOR--

HELLO-- WHAT'S THIS--?

GOD IN A BOTTLE--

--HAS IT BEEN SO LONG--

--SO MANY YEARS... SINCE I'VE BEEN IN THIS WING...?

I'D FORGOTTEN HOW COOL TO THE TOUCH-- AND HOW HEAVY IT IS...

...STILL FEELS LIKE A THREAT...

...WONDER IF IT STILL LOOKS LIKE A PROMISE...

PROMISE.

:snort!: PROMISE!

SPARE ME YOUR OLD WORLD NOBILITY, GLINT--ALL THAT CODE OF HUMAN HONOR BULLSHIT..

I COULD SAY THE SAME FOR YOUR TEETH-GNASHING SELF-PITY, STARKER--

JUST GIVE ME YOUR WORD YOU'LL HOLD YOUR FIRE FOR A HALF HOUR--

YOU'VE GOT FIFTEEN MINUTES-- MAX--

COME OFF IT, STARKER-- YOU KNOW DAMNED WELL I NEED MORE TIME THAN THAT TO TALK BRUNO OUT OF THE BUSH--

--WITH ALL THIS "NEXT MESSIAH" STUFF FLOATING AROUND, YOU KNOW HOW RITUALISTIC HIS PEOPLE HAVE BECOME--

PEOPLE-?! :snort--!!:

THAT'S ENOUGH, VALENTINE--

FIFTEEN MINUTES, GLINT-- THAT'S ALL MY BOYS'LL STAND--

--THIS SKIRMISH HAS PUSHED US ALL PAST THE THIN RED LINE!!!

LOOK--I UNDERSTAND YOUR POSITION--BUT YOU HAVE TO SEE THINGS FROM THE MUSEUM'S POINT OF VIEW, AS WELL--

--IF WE WIPE THEM ALL OUT, THE HUMAN RACE WOULDN'T LAST A CENTURY--

OH, BULLSHIT-- WE CAN MAKE BETTER--

I SAID, THAT'S ENOUGH, VALENTINE--

FIFTEEN MINUTES, GLINT-- AND THE CLOCK IS TICKING--

"IT WASN'T THAT GENOCIDE WAS A NEW IDEA-- IT WAS SIMPLY THAT THE SUBTEXT OF GENOCIDE-- RITUAL SEPUKKY-- HAD NEVER BEEN SO HEARTILY WORSHIPPED SINCE THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY."

"THE WAR HAD BEEN OVER FOR A YEAR--IT WAS THE MOPPING UP PROCESS THAT SEEMED TO TAKE FOREVER...

"...I'D WATCHED FROM A SAFE DISTANCE AS OUR DRONE BOMBERS HAD TURNED THIS PIECE OF PERUVIAN REAL ESTATE INTO A MILE-WIDE CEREAL BOWL...

"...BUT THEY STILL HELD ON TO THE LAND--LIKE A RAT ON A THUMB...

"...THE HIGH WALLS OF THE NEWLY MINTED VALLEY CARRIED SOUND LIKE VOICES OVER WATER..."

TOMMY TOMORROW IS RIGHT--

--WE OUGHT TO WALTZ RIGHT IN THERE WITH A COUPLE O' TUBES OF THERMO-GEL AND BARBECUE THE--

FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, VALENTINE--

--YOU SOUND LIKE YOU'VE BEEN READING TOO MUCH OF GLINT'S YELLOW JOURNAL HORSESHIT--

COME ON, CHIEF--EVERY EUGENICS ENGINEER SAYS WE CAN SYNTHESIZE NEARLY ANYTHING--BETTER THAN THE ORIGINAL--

--SO WHY DON'T WE JUST HERD 'EM ALL INTO ONE COUNTRY--AND NUKE THE BASTARDS BACK TO THE STONE AGE--?

--AND LET THE BIO-GENETECHNICS WHIP US UP SOME MORE DOMESTICATED--

BECAUSE, IN A COUPLE O' GENERATIONS, THEY'D REBEL--

--THAT'S WHAT SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS ARE FOR--

--DON'T YOU YOUNG ASSHOLES READ YOUR HISTORY--?

AS MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT, GLINT IS RIGHT--

YEAH, SURE--AND YOU PROBABLY BELIEVE THIS "NEXT MESSIAH" SHIT, TOO...

I AM HOMER GLINT--I WISH TO SPEAK WITH YOUR CHIEF...

...I AM UNARMED.

OH, COME OFF IT, JOCKO--WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO--

--HERD US ALL TOGETHER AND NUKE US ONCE AND FOR ALL--?

"I'D KNOWN IDIOTS IN MY TIME--"

"--BUT NONE COULD COMPARE WITH RICHARD PURVIS."

REALLY, RICK-- WHERE DO--

SHUT UP, KAREL-- AND KEEP YOUR CAMERA ROLLING--

ISN'T THAT PRECISELY WHAT THE YELLOW JOURNALOIDS ARE SUGGESTING--AS THE FINAL SOLUTION TO THE ANIMAL PROBLEM...?

THAT'S JUST POST-WAR REVENGE HYSTERIA--AND YOU KNOW IT, JOE--

MY CHRISTIAN NAME IS BRUNO-- USE IT--

"MAN HAD SPENT A GOOD PART OF THE LAST FEW CENTURIES MUCKING UP THE BIO-SPHERE-- ANIMAL, VEGETABLE AND MINERAL--

"--NOW THE ANIMALS-- IN LEAGUE WITH TOO DAMN MANY MACHINES-- WERE MUCKING RIGHT BACK..."

THE WAR IS OVER, BRUNO-- YOU KNOW THAT--

--WE ARE NO LONGER ENEMIES--

BUT WE'LL NEVER BE PEOPLE, EITHER--

--WE'RE TO BE PROCESSED-- LIKE CHEESE-- OR JEWS--

LOOK HERE, BRUNO-- I SPEAK AS A FRIEND--

--YOU CANNOT WIN--

--SOONER OR LATER, THE KILL SQUADS'LL GET YOU...

"DEAR KAREL-- SHE ALWAYS HAD A WAY WITH ANIMALS-- EVEN THEN-- BEFORE--"

THE KINGDOM WILL WAIT-- FOR THE MESSIAH TO COME--

--MEANWHILE-- IT IS BETTER TO DIE ON OUR HIND LEGS THAN LIVE ON OUR BELLIES--

"SOMEONE HAD BEEN READING MY STUFF...!"

COME ON, YOU BIG APE--

--YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT FOR TRIPLANET INTERLINK NEWS--

HOMER--MY DEAREST HUMAN FRIEND--

QUALIFICATION NOTED--AND RESENTED--

I CAN-NOT APOLOGIZE, MAN--

"ONLY A GORILLA COULD CONJURE SUCH CONTEMPT IN THAT ONE SYLLABLE..."

--IF YOU WOULD TRULY SUPPORT OUR CAUSE, JOIN US IN THE TREES...

YOU'RE BEING TERRIBLY SIMPLE, BRUNO--

HOMER IS RIGHT--I'M CERTAIN I SPEAK FOR ALL OF US WHEN I SAY--

--I WILL DO EVERYTHING WITHIN MY POWER TO SEE THAT YOU, AND ALL OF YOUR FOLLOWERS, WILL BE REINTEGRATED INTO THE SOCIETAL MATRIX PAINLESSLY--

"SOCIETAL MATRIX...?

"LOVE/HATE PROBABLY BEST DESCRIBES MY LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP WITH KAREL--BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE DIVORCE--

"--BUT THIS ACT OF UTTER SELFLESSNESS, HOWEVER, COMPLETELY DISTRACTED ME..."

DOES SHE ALWAYS TALK LIKE THIS, HOMER--

ONLY WHEN THE ISHERWOOD 165 IMPLANT IS OPERATIVE--

THAT'S WHEN I AM A CAMERA--

"...SO I NEVER NOTICED PURVIS' TREACHERY...

"...UNTIL IT WAS AN HISTORIC EVENT..."

A COMMISSION IN THE PLANETEERS..?!?

YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS, ROEMER..

DAMN RIGHT I'M SERIOUS..

--WHILE YOU SUBHUMANS ARE STUCK HERE ON THIS SHITTY LITTLE MUDBALL..

--CHASING MONKEYS UP A TREE..

I'M GONNA USE MY RE-UP BONUS TO GET NEXT TO BIG TOM--

I HEAR HE'S A TOTAL BUG-FUCK--THINKS HE'S THE NEXT--

WANNA KNOW WHY I'M GOIN' FOR THE PLANETEERS, VALENTINE--?

'CAUSE THEY WOULDN'T LET ALLEY SCUM HALF-BREEDS LIKE YOU IN--

YOU LOWLIFE SCUMBAG--

LIGHTEN UP, PAL--MY MOTHER HAD TWO LEGS--AND HAIR--

--YOURS HAD FOUR LEGS--AND A FAUCET--

"AND THIS WAS THE CRÈME DE LA CRÈME--! NO WONDER YOU COULDN'T FIND AN ANIMAL IN A THOUSAND MILES WHO'D TRUST US...!

GENTLEMEN!

ROEMER--YOU WANT TO PISS YOUR BONUS AWAY WITH THAT BUNCH OF SPACE NAZIS--BE MY GUEST--

BUT UNTIL WE BRING THIS POLICE ACTION TO ITS PEACEFUL CONCLUSION, I WILL NOT HEAR ANOTHER WORD ABOUT THAT GANGSTER BASTARD TOMORROW--YOU CATCH--?

KRAKOWA!! KRAKOWA!! KRAKOWA!!

SHOOT LOW, MEN--

--AND STAY LOW, TOO--

BUT WON'T THEY SHOOT LOW--GU-- UCCHH!!

THEY GOT ROEMER--

NO GREAT LOSS--

SPUNGK! CPUNCH

KATAKLOKK!

JUST CLEAN 'EM OUT--

YEAH-- LIKE FISH--

"THERE'S *NO* WAY TO DESCRIBE IT--THE INTERMINGLED STACCATO OF GUNFIRE, MELDING WITH THE *SHRIEKS* OF SCREAMING METAL AND THE GRUNTING *ROAR* OF DYING ANIMALS AND MEN...

"...LET'S *FACE* IT--THE FAUNA *NEVER* HAD A *CHANCE*..."

GLINT-- SORENSEN-- FURVIS-- WHERE--

YEEOWW-- JESUS, VALENTINE-- THAT'S MY--

STARKER-- OVER *HERE!*

POKPOKPOKPOKPOKPOKPOKPO

WE'VE GOT THE OFFICERS COVERED IN THE BIG HUT--

GOD, KAREL--

--I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU LET HIM--

--IT--TOUCH YOU LIKE TH--

WHAT THE HELL BUSINESS IS IT OF YOURS HOW I DO MY JOB--?!?

"IN THE MIDDLE OF A TOTALLY POINTLESS FIRE-FIGHT--FOR WHICH HE WAS COMPLETELY RESPONSIBLE--THIS DICKHEAD COMES ON LIKE--WELL, YOU GET THE PICTURE..."

DAMNED RIGHT IT'S MY BUSINESS. YOU LET THIS... APE... TOUCH YOU--PAW YOU--

I AM NOT AN APE--I AM A--

JUST SHUT UP YOU TRAVESTY OF--

DO YOU THINK YOU TWO COULD PUT THIS LITTLE SPAT ON HOLD FOR LATER--

--AND PERHAPS DEAL WITH OUR PRESENT SITUATION--?

YOU KNOW, HOMER-- WHEN YOU GET THAT SELF-RIGHTEOUS WHEEZE IN YOUR VOICE--

--I CAN ALMOST SEE THE STAR-ROVER LOGO OVER YOUR HEAD--LIKE A HALO--

--OR A DUNCE CAP--

"YOU CAN SEE WHAT I MEANT BY LOVE/HATE..."

OKAY, FOLKS... EVERYTHING'S UNDER CONTROL--

LET'S PUT AWAY THE *WEAPONS*, PURVIS--

--*EVERYTHING'S* NEUTRALIZED--

ARE YOU *ALL RIGHT*, MS. SORENSEN--?

NOT *NOW*, STARKER--

DOES YOUR OFFER OF AMNESTY *STILL* APPLY, HOMER--MY *DEAREST* FRIEND--?

YOU *DO* GET BIG POINTS FOR *GALL*, BRUNO--

BUT-- *BUT*--YOU SAW-- IT WAS THIS-- *MAN*--WHO FIRED *FIRST*--

LADIES-- *AND* GENTLEMEN-- I *HAVE* MY ORDERS--

AND I *STILL* DON'T LIKE HIM *TOUCHING* YOU THAT WAY--

THAT'S NOT *MY* PROBLEM-- AND *ANYWAY*--

--I THINK IT GOT YOU *HOTTER* THAN YOU CARE TO *ADMIT*--

WHAT!?!

THAT'S *RIGHT*--SO DON'T GET SO DAMNED BENT OUT OF SHAPE OVER IT--

DON'T TELL *ME* ABOUT BENT OUT OF SHAPE--

WHY DON'T WE START *ACTING* LIKE THE *DOMINANT* SPE--

FUCK *OFF*, GLINT--

HOMER--!

HUH--?!?

THIS IS *MAN'S* WORK--

CHUNNGG

GKKK

"AND *SO*, WITH *ONE* STROKE, RICK PURVIS-- BIG, DUMB, VICIOUS *RICK PURVIS*--"

"--ENDED *FOREVER* ANY REAL *POSSIBILITY* OF A LASTING *PEACE* BETWEEN MANKIND AND THE ANIMAL/AUTOMATON MATRIX...

"...AND, OF COURSE, MADE *HIMSELF* AN INTERPLANETARY *HERO*..."

THIS IS RICHARD PURVIS-- TRIPLANET INTER-LINK *NEWS*--

"I DIDN'T *WANT* TO DO IT--BUT I *HAD* TO--IT'S MY *JOB*--"

--AND I CAN TELL YOU-- AS AN EYEWITNESS-- A *PARTICIPANT* IN *HISTORY*--

"--MAKING *HEROES*..."

--THE WAR IS *OVER*...

"--IT'S JUST THAT THE RAW MATERIAL WAS *ALWAYS* MORE SOW'S EAR THAN SILK PURSES..."

ONCE *AGAIN* THE ANIMAL KINGDOM KNOWS ITS *PLACE*--

--AND MAN NO *LONGER* NEED LIVE IN FEAR OF HIS MACHINES...

"ALMOST *EVERY* MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD ON THE OCCUPIED INNER PLANETS--

"--TO THE *RIM* OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM--

"--BOUGHT PURVIS'-- (MEANING *MY*)-- REWRITTEN VERSION OF THE EVENT--

"--WITH OF *COURSE*, A NUMBER OF NOTABLE *EXCEPTIONS*..."

STAR ROVERS--! :*SNORRT*!:

BUNCH OF *CHICKEN-SHITS*--

THE CHIEF SAYS THEY'VE *NEVER* EVEN CROSSED DEEP SPACE...

RIPLANET ISH-165 KAREL SORENSEN: Unterlink Viewmaster

RAM2

PURVIS BECOMES THE IDOL OF *MILLIONS*, CUTTING A BIG BAD GORILLA'S HEAD OFF--

--I MEAN, *BIG* DEAL, RIGHT--IT'S A *HARD* WORLD..

YEAH, YEAH--BUT IT'S *GREAT* COPY--

--BIG, STRONG, HANDSOME *HUMAN*.. WITH A *BIRTH* CERTIFICATE, NO LESS--

--PROTECTING THE *VIRTUOUS* PURITY OF BLONDE WOMANHOOD FROM THE *GROSS* PAWING OF THAT *DISGUSTING* APE--

--YOU CAN *SMELL* THE *PERSPIRATION* ON UPPER LIPS EVERY-WHERE--

AND IT'S GOT HOMER GLINT WRITTEN ALL OVER IT...

...DAMN *RIGHT*-- OL' MR. SILK PURSE HIM--

...THE LITTLE *SHIT*.

"WELL--I NEVER PLANNED TO PLEASE *EVERYBODY*..."

ENOUGH OF *THAT*...

...WHAT'S THE PROGRESS ON THE BIG *HUNT*...?

SAME OLD STUFF...

...IF WE COULD AFFORD TO GO *PAST* THE OUTER RIM, IT'S *POSSIBLE* WE *MIGHT* BE ABLE TO PICK UP *SOME* TRACE--

--BUT EVEN *THERE*, EVERY INDICATION IS THAT WE WIPED THE *LAST* OF THE METHUSELOIDS OUT FIFTEEN *YEARS* AGO...

DON'T LET THE *CHIEF* HEAR YOU TALKING LIKE *THAT*--

--THE *LAST* THING HE WANTS TO KNOW IS THAT HE CUT OFF HIS OWN NOSE TO *SPITE*--

I COULD *MAYBE* UNDERSTAND THE COMMODORE'S OBSESSION WITH STAYING *YOUNG*, IF--

THE PROBLEM--WOOD, IS IT?--IS THAT YOU *DON'T* UNDERSTAND *ANYTHING* AT *ALL*!

--IT'S NOT THAT I WANT TO STAY YOUNG--

I WANT TO LIVE FOREVER.

--HONESTLY, GENTLEMEN--

--WITH ALL THIS TALK OF THE "NEXT MESSIAH"--

--WHO BETTER THAN ME--?

CERTAINLY, MANKIND DESERVES IT.

"IF, AS THE ENGLISH POETS PUT IT, VANITY'S NAME IS WOMAN--

"--THEN PSYCHOPATHIC EGO OUT OF CONTROL IS SURELY CALLED TOMMY TOMORROW."

MAN ISN'T REALLY ALL THAT REMOVED FROM THESE ANIMALS SO RECENTLY VANQUISHED--

--WITH THE RIGHT CONDITIONING, HE CAN DO ANY TRICK YOU CAN TEACH HIM...

...EVEN THE ONES WITH BIRTH CERTIFICATES--NOT JUST LAB REPORTS--

"TOMORROW NEVER GOT OVER BEING AN ORPHAN--NEVER KNOWING WHETHER HE WAS BORN OF WOMAN--OR PETRI DISH...

"...IT MADE OF HIM A XENOPHOBIC MONSTER, OBSESSED WITH EVENTUAL LIFE--"

--WITH ALL THIS GENE-SPLICING AND INTER-SPECIES MISCEGENATION--

"...AND I MADE HIM A LEGEND IN HIS OWN TIME--A HERO OF THE FIRST INTER PLANETARY WAR...

I KNOW, COMMODORE--FOR MANKIND TO SURVIVE--WE MUST LIVE LONGER--

--ORGANICALLY--NOT BIONICALLY.

I COULDN'T HAVE SAID IT BETTER MYSELF.

YOU DID SAY IT, SIR--

--OR RATHER, HOMER GLINT SAYS YOU DID...

"SMART BOY..."

HMMMM...

...AT ANY RATE--

--THE BEST HOPE MANKIND HAS TO REACH THE STARS IS IMMORTALITY--

--AND THE ONLY HOPE WE HAVE FOR IMMORTALITY IS TO FIND THE LAST OF THE METHUSELOIDS...

...AND, FOR YOUR INFORMATION, ROEMER--LAY OFF HOMER GLINT--

--AFTER ALL--HE INVENTED ME, TOO.

GUY I'M LOOKING FOR'S A BIG FELLOW--

--NOT SO MUCH TALL AS BROAD-- KIND OF BIG CHESTED..

WHITE HAIR--?

THAT'S THE GUY..

HAVEN'T SEEN HIM.

"WHY DON'T WE JUST HERD 'EM ALL INTO ONE COUNTRY--AND NUKE 'EM BACK TO THE STONE AGE--I THINK THAT'S HOW THEY PUT IT...

"WELL, IF IT EVER CAME TO THAT, THE COUNTRY WOULD HAVE BEEN MEXICO."

OKAY--OKAY- HOW MUCH IS IT GOING TO COST ME--?

FORGET THE PAPER BUX, BUDDY-

--I'LL TAKE THE POWER UNIT FROM YOUR CAMERA..

"THE NUCLEAR EXCHANGE OF 2081 WIPED OUT 98% OF THE HUMAN POPULATION OF MEXICO--ALONG WITH MOST OF WHAT USED TO BE THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST...

"... WHEN THE METHUSELOIDS GOT THE ANIMALS AND ROBOTS ALL WORKED UP-- LEADING TO THE INTER-SPECIES WAR--

"--NEARLY EVERY MECHANICAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE MIGRATED TO MEXICO--"

THE MAN YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS ACROSS THE STREET--

HUH...?!?

SOME DETECTIVE.

HE'S HOLED UP AT MADAME METALLICA'S BODY ELECTRIC.

"--WITHIN A YEAR, THAT REMAINING 2% OF HUMAN POPULATION HAD VANISHED..."

I AM LOOKING FOR THIS MAN--

I AM VERY SORRY-- WE DO NOT ENCOURAGE HUMAN CLIENTELE--

PERHAPS YOU'LL RECOGNIZE-

MADAME METALLICA'S HOUSE OF MECHANICAL BLISS

NO HUMANS ALLOWED

"IT TAKES MORE *GUTS* THAN *BRAINS* FOR A MAN TO VISIT A ROBOTIC CITY-- *UNESCORTED*.. "

I HAVE *NEVER* SEEN THIS--

FITNESS TUNE-UPS

SPA-FONNGCHHHHH

SQUUU

AXEL...?

IZZAT YOU, BOY--?

"AXEL STARKER--A.K.A. STAR HAWKINS--HAD BEEN BLESSED WITH ALL THE FINESSE HIS OLDER BROTHER LACKED..."

OH, SHIT.

I'VE GOT NO TIME FOR YOUR ANTICS, JOHN--

--I JUST MAGNUSSED AN OLD MAN--

YOU SPA-FONCHED KAPEK-!?

HE WAS A HARMLESS OL' COOT--

HE WAS JUST ANOTHER DEGENERATE WITH A CASE OF THE HOTS FOR COLD STEEL...

"...BUT, FOR A SNEAKY LITTLE GUMSHOE WHO MADE HIS LIVING POKING INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS...

"...HE HAD REMARKABLY LITTLE TOLERANCE OF HIS FELLOW MAN'S FOIBLES..."

YOU COULD... uhhh...BE A LITTLE EASIER ON YOUR OLDER BROTHER...

I'LL BE EASIER ON YOU WHEN YOU OUTGROW THIS DISGUSTING OBSESSION WITH ROBOT SEX...

GUS

THAT I CAN'T PROMISE...

...BUT HAND ME MY SHIRT AND WE CAN LEAVE...

KAPEK WAS THE SILENT OWNER OF THIS DIVE--TO WHOM I WAS SO KNEE-DEEP IN DEBT--

SO I CANCELLED YOUR DEBT--JUST LIKE I ALWAYS CLEAN UP AFTER YOU--LET'S GO, JOHN--BEFORE--

SORRY, LADIES--

COME OUT, WITH YOUR HANDS UP--

SPANK
NKLESPANGANG

"ONCE IT BECAME OBVIOUS TO WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE VARIOUS TERRAN GOVERNMENTS THAT MEXICO WAS A MECHANICAL NATION, DIPLOMATIC CREDENTIALS WERE EXCHANGED--"

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

MADAME METALLICA'S HOUSE OF MECHANICAL BLISS

BIPED TROUBLEMAKERS-- BOTH HUMAN--

DON'T YOU PIMPS EVER LEARN--?

THERE'S A REASON YOU'RE NOT PERMITTED TO SOLICIT HUMAN BUSIN--

SOLICIT--!? HE MAGNUSSED THE DOORMAN-- AND OLD KAPEK--

"--BUT RELATIONS NEVER REALLY IMPROVED PAST THE STRAINED STAGE..."

I THINK WE CAN FORGET LEAVING BY THE FRONT DOOR AS A VIABLE OPTION--

YOU ARE CHARGED WITH THE USE OF AN OUTLAWED, HIGHLY ILLEGAL WEAPON-- THE PENALTY FOR WHICH IS DISMEMBER-MENT...

HOWEVER, YOU ARE PROTECTED BY THE TRIPLANET COMMISSION INTERSPECIES RELATIONS ACT #412--

"...RIGHT--!

"--LET'S JUST SAY THAT TRIPLANETARY PROTECTION WAS ON A PAR WITH A CONDOM FROM THE VATICAN-- GET MY DRIFT--?"

--WHICH GUARANTEES IMMUNITY FROM MACHINE-INFLICTED VIOLENCE--

I'LL FEEL A LOT HAPPIER WITH THE IMMUNITY GUARANTEED BY PUTTING AN OCEAN BETWEEN ME AND THESE COPS--

GET THE HELL OFF OF ME--!

I WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND YOUR DESIRE FOR THEM, JOHN--

THAT'S YOUR PROBLEM--

I CAN HEAR THEM SNEAKING UP THE STAIRS-- LET'S GO--

SO-- HOW'S ILDA?

FUNNY YOU SHOULD ASK...

SKRRRRRRAEEEEEEEE

INCREDIBLE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN-- INCREDIBLE--

--WHAT A MOVE--

--CLEARLY DARING YOUNG "IMPERVIOUS" RICK PURVIS DOES NOT KNOW THE MEANING OF FEAR...

"MOST LIKELY HE COULDN'T SPELL IT EITHER..."

PURVIS 3

SKRRRR REEEEEEEE

IT'S CERTAINLY BEEN A METEORIC YEAR FOR YOUNG PURVIS--AS THE YOUNG STAR ROVER HAS GONE FROM BLOWING THE LID OFF THE SO-CALLED NEXT MAN LEAGUE SCANDAL--

--TO CHAMPIONING THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN HIS FINAL EYE-TO-EYE, TOE-TO-TOE WITH BRUNO, THE GORILLA GANGSTER...

...FROM A YOUNG MAN REPORTING THE NEWS--TO A YOUNG MAN MAKING IT--

--AND IT LOOKS LIKE RICK PURVIS--THAT RED-BLOODED SON OF AN HONEST WOMAN--

"DEBATABLE..."

--THE MAN WHO PUT THE "MAN" BACK IN HUMANITY-

"...OH BROTHER..."

EEEE SKRR

--IS GOING TO WREST THE TRIPLANET SKEELING TROPHY FROM THE OILY GRASP OF NOUVEAU RICHE OFFWORLD LUMBER CZAR FERIC IRONWOLF--

--AND RETURN IT TO ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE ON EARTH.

YES SIR-- OUR BOY PURVIS IS REALLY SHOWING THE UPSTART OFF-WORLDER HOW THIS GAME IS PLAYED--

RICK PU

IRONWOLF

INDUSTRIA MARC

IRONWOLF

"I'VE LIVED AN AWFULLY LONG TIME--AND UNLIKE THAT OLD SONG--HOW'D IT GO--'REGRETS--I'VE HAD A FEW'--I GOT PLENTY--

"--MY MARRIAGE TO KAREL...MY TURNING TOMORROW INTO A LIVING LEGEND...MY LIFELONG AGNOSTICISM...

"...BUT NOTHING COMES CLOSE TO THE SELF-LOATHING I FEEL OVER MAKING PURVIS A HOUSEHOLD WORD...HE WAS THE ABSOLUTE WORST."

SKREEEEEEEE!!

"RICK WAS A RICH, SPOILED, ARROGANT GASBAG--WHO BOUGHT HIS GOOD LOOKS FROM A PLASTICHE SURGEON..."

VISITOR 7 period 2 HOME 7
PENALTY TIME 1:20 14:53

"...AND A REAL ASSHOLE, BESIDES--WHO, I'M CONVINCED--"

VISITOR 7 period 2 HOME 7
PENALTY 10 TIME 1:22 14:55

VISITOR 7 period 2 HOME 7
PENALTY TIME 1:25 14:58

dingdingding
gdingdingdin
ngdingdingdi
ingdingdingd

VISITOR 7 period 2 HOME 7
PENALTY TIME 1:27 15:00

PURVIS LOSES HIS PORT SIDE SKID--

IRONWOLF JINKS STARBOARD--

--THE TWO SKEELERS ARE LOCKED--

--WHAT A MOVE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN--

SCORE

SKRRREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!

SHOOOOTTTTT...SKTLEENNNCCCCCHHHHHHH!!!

KATA-KATA-KATA-KARUNNNNNNCHHHHHHH

"--HAD GOTTEN KAREL INTO THE SACK A GOOD TWO YEARS BEFORE SHE DIVORCED ME..."

YOU SEE, HOMER DARLING--

--RICK IS AT LEAST AS BIG, BRAVE AND RED-BLOODED AS YOU MADE HIM OUT TO BE--

--SO YOUR JOURNALISTC REPUTATION WONT BE DAMAGED BY ANY--

TELL ME SOMETHING, KAREL--

--WHEN YOU HAD YOUR ISHERWOOD IMPLANTED--YOU HAD TO SIGN SEVERAL OATHS--

--PROMISES OF A, QUOTE, FEALTY TO THE LITERAL TRUTH, END QUOTE...

YES--SO--WHAT ARE--

OH, I SEE--YOU'RE BEING IRONIC...

"BOY--DID THAT PISS HER OFF--ALL THE TIME..."

MS. SORENSEN-- MR. GLINT-- HOW *VERY* DELIGHTFUL TO SEE YOU BOTH--

--RINGSIDE FOR MR. GLINT--

YOUR DAMNED SENSE OF *HUMOR* ALWAYS SETS MY TEETH ON *EDGE*..

WELL, YOU *CERTAINLY* WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT *THAT* FROM OL' RICKY BOY, *WILL* YOU--?

AND WHAT'S *THAT* SUPPOSED TO *MEAN*..?

IT'S SUPPOSED TO *MEAN* THAT THE SORT OF *PILLOW* TALK *I'D* EXPECT FROM PURVIS WOULD BE *CA-CA* JOKES..

PORQUE?

MUST YOU, HOMER-- IN *PUBLIC*..

IF YOU WERE A *TAD* LESS CONCERNED WITH WHAT EVERYBODY *ELSE* THOUGHT--

..AND A BIT *MORE* CONCERNED ABOUT *ME*-

YOU..!?

WHO GIVES A *SHIT* ABOUT YOU..!?!

I DUMPED YOU AS SOON AS I SAW *THROUGH* THAT SHALLOW FACADE YOU CALL A *PERSONALITY*, HOMER..

--I HAVE TO *WORK* WITH YOU--BUT AS FOR *ANYTHING* ELSE-- GET *BENT*-- OKAY--?

"AS YOU CAN SEE, KAREL WAS *ALWAYS* A WONDERFUL WOMAN--WITH THAT SUBTLE TOUCH ONE ASSOCIATES WITH *PRISON* GUARDS..."

HEY, YOU TWO.. *GREAT* NEWS..!

WE'RE *FINALLY* ABOUT TO LIVE UP TO OUR *NAME*..

..THE STAR ROVERS HAVE THEIR *FIRST* OFFWORLD ASSIGNMENT..

OH, *SWELL*..

PURVIS 8

YEAH-- WE'RE OFF TO THE *RIM*...

AHH, YES-- A *RIMJOB*..

MUST YOU, HOMER..?

DID I MISS SOMETHING..??

FORGET IT..

..WHAT ABOUT OUR COMMITMENT TO NORDSTELLAR-TRONICS..?

EASTEUROPA WILL GET BY FINE WITHOUT..

BUT WHAT ABOUT ENGLAND..?

PURVIS

OH, COME OFF IT, HOMER--NOBODY GIVES A DAMN ABOUT ENGLAND..

"IN OL' RICK'S CASE, HE PROBABLY WASN'T QUITE SURE HE COULD FIND ENGLAND..."

HEY-- FIDO--FETCH ME A BLACK FREIGHTER--WITH A TWIST..

OH, MR. PURVIS--

..I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU--YOU TOOK MY BREATH AWAY OUT THERE...

WHY, THANK YOU, MS...

JUST CALL ME JAKI...

I THINK I HEAR YOUR KEEPER CALLING, JAKI-- OR IS IT YOUR PROCURER?

IRONY, KAREL?

I'LL BE OFF THE WINNER'S CIRCLE, RICK--IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN FEMININE COMPANY...

SHE DOES HAVE A POINT, YOU KNOW--YOU COULD USE A LITTLE SMOOTHING AROUND THE EDGES...

YOU CAN BOTH GO TO HELL...

SHE IS IN ONE OF HER MOODS, EH, HOME..?

IT'S BAD ENOUGH SHE REFERS TO "BOTH" OF US..

..I TRULY LOATHE THAT FRATERNAL, SHARED EXPERIENCE TONE YOU GET WHEN YOU SPEAK TO..

YOU AND KAREL ARGUING ABOUT ME AGAIN, HUH...?

I'D BE FLATTERED.. IF IT WEREN'T SO PATHETIC...

...I MEAN, IT'S PRETTY CLEAR YOU BOTH HAVE THE HOTS FOR ME...

"NOT TO PROTEST TOO MUCH--BUT--NO. NO. NO. PERIOD."

I DIDN'T PULL YOUR FAT ASS OUT OF THAT ROBOT WHOREHOUSE..

--JUST TO LISTEN TO YOUR SELF-PITYING BULLSHIT...

YOU KNOW WHAT THIS DAMNED SPACE MUSEUM DOES TO ME...

"AH, YES... THE SPACE MUSEUM... TALK ABOUT IRONY..

"--THAT AN INSTITUTION SO DEVOTED TO LOOKING WITHIN--TO STAYING WITHIN THE CONFINES OF EARTH... SHOULD CALL ITSELF THE MUSEUM OF SPACE."

SO-- WHY THE HELL DID YOU WANT TO COME HERE--?

SO I COULD RUB MY NOSE IN MY OWN PAST--

WELL, IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU REJOINED THE REST OF US HOPELESSLY STRANDED IN THE REAL WORLD, AND LISTEN TO ME--

MAD TOURS

--ILDA HAS BEEN STOL-- KIDNAPPED-- FOR RANSOM--

STAR CROSSED HEROES

THE DYNAMIC SPACE TRAVELERS OF THE SECOND AGE OF SPACE (2069-2102) THESE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN WERE THE FIRST TO TAKE MAN'S SEED AND SOW IT STARWARD, CARRYING MANIFEST DESTINY TO ITS LOGICAL CONCLUSION

YEAH-- SURE-- MANIFEST DESTINY--

--FIRST WE SPOIL OUR OWN NEST-- SO THEN IT'S TIME TO FIND A NEW ONE TO DIMINISH AND REDUCE...

WHERE DOES THIS EVANGELICAL LOVE OF THE LAND COME FROM ALL OF A SUDDEN--?

I MEAN, LET US NOT FORGET--

YOU WERE ONE OF THOSE SPOILERS-- AND HAPPY AS A PIG IN SHIT TO BE ONE, TOO--

YEAH, SURE--BUT OLD TOMMY--HE ALWAYS WAS--AS-- THE ABSOLUTE BEST--

BEST?! AT WHAT--? I THOUGHT YOU HATED--

HOLLY "HUMMER" KEETON AT THE CHRISTENING OF SKYLAB 1

TOMMY TOMORROW WAS AN ASS-KISSING, BROWN-NOSING LITTLE ARYAN WHO SOLD OUT THE WOMAN HE LOVED FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF MEDIA ATTENTION--

--AND STILL MANAGED TO BLOW HIS OWN MISSION...

YOU MEAN THIS MESSIAH THING--?

NO-- NO!

HE'S GOT THAT BUNCH OF FASCIST SPACE SCOUTS TEARING APART KNOWN SPACE--

TRYING TO FIND THE LAST REMNANTS OF THE METHUSELOIDS--

--IN THE VAIN HOPE THAT HE DIDN'T BLOW HIS ONE CHANCE TO LIVE FOREVER...

LIKE I SAID-- ILDA'S GOTTA BE BROUGHT BACK--I THOUGHT--

CAPTAIN THOMAS "TOMMY" TOMORROW & LIEUTENANT JOHN "MANHUNTER" STARKER VETERANS OF THE FIRST ALIEN WAR

DAMN, IT WAS COLD-- THAT LAST NIGHT--

--DAMP AND COLD--

--LISTEN, TOMMY--

--YOU WANT TO SIT OUT HERE IN THE WET DARK, THAT'S YOUR RED WAGON--

HEY, MAN-- THOSE CLUCKERS GOT MY BRENDA -- AMONG OTHER PRISONERS--

--YOU THINK I WANT TO BE HERE...?

SORRY-- I WASN'T THINKING--

NOTHING NEW THERE...

IF YOU DON'T NEED ME, I'M HEADING INLAND FOR A SNOOZE--

YOU'RE COVERED PAL-- JUST BRING ME SOME COCO-MOKO WHEN YOU COME BACK--

YOU BET-- AND DON'T FORGET THE OLD MAN'S ORDERS--

-- WE DON'T HIT THE CLUCKERS 'TIL DAYLIGHT.

YEAH-- SURE...

...LEASTWAYS, NOT TILL YOU'RE OUT OF EARSHOT--

D'YOU SAY SOMETHING, CAP--

JUST THINKING OUT LOUD--

--OF HOW MUCH BEHIND-THE-LINES MOVEMENT WE'VE NOTICED FROM THE CLUCKERS TODAY...

...THEY'RE OBVIOUSLY BUILDING UP TO A BIG ASSAULT OR A LONG SIEGE--

--EITHER WAY, THIS SITUATION IS A WHOLE LOT MORE VOLATILE THAN IT LOOKS FROM THE OLD MAN'S DESK...

SO-- WHAT DO YOU SAY WE HIT 'EM-- LOW AND DIRTY--

NOW--!

"HE LOST THREE OFFICERS-- INCLUDING HIS PREGNANT WIFE-- AND WIPED OUT THE REMAINS OF A RACE THAT WAS ANTIQUE WHEN MAN WAS PAINTING HIS ASS BLUE AND BAYING AT THE MOON...

"...BUT HOMER GLINT MADE HIM OUT TO BE A HERO ON THE INTER-LINK NEWS-- AND IT STUCK--

"WHAT STUCK FOR ME WERE THOSE SHOTS OF ME WITH THAT ROBOT IN CHURCH...

"THEY COURT-MARTIALED ME-- KICKED ME OUT OF THE SERVICE--

"--AND I WAS A FORGOTTEN MAN IN THREE MONTHS...

"...THEY COURT-MARTIALED TOMORROW AND HE BECAME A BIGGER HERO-- WITH ENOUGH CONTRIBUTIONS POURING IN TO TELL THE MARINES TO SHOVE IT...

"...AND TO MOUNT HIS OWN LITTLE SOFTBALL AND CHOWDER SOCIETY--"

DIDN'T I SAY I WASN'T INTERESTED IN YOUR SELF-PITY...?

LET US NOT FORGET-- WE CAME HERE TO DISCUSS MY PROBLEM-- NOT--

I SAID THAT WASN'T MY NAME ANY--!

BLOW IT OUT, AXEL--

FINE, FINE-- STAR-- JESUS--

--IT'S NOT YOUR PROBLEM-- IT'S ILDA'S...

...SHE'S THE ONE WHO'S BEEN KIDNAPPED--

--AND SHE'S THE ONE WHO LOVES YOU--

OH COME OFF IT, JOHN-- SH--ILDA IS A ROBOT-!

AND SHE'S THE ONE WHO'S GOING TO BE HEART-BROKEN WHEN YOU SEND SOMEONE ELSE TO PICK HER UP--

--LIKE A PIECE OF LUGGAGE AT THE AIRPORT...

JOHN-- FOR THE LAST TIME--GET THIS STRAIGHT--

--I DON'T, IN ANY WAY, SHARE YOUR SOCIOSEXUAL PREDILEICTION FOR OUR MECHANICAL FRIENDS--

--THE REAL ISSUE HERE IS NOT SO MUCH THAT SHE LOVES ME--

--IT'S THAT YOU LOVE HER--

--NOW, IF YOU WOULD MAKE THIS OFFWORLD JUMP FOR ME, I'D BE MUCH MORE THAN OBLIGED-- AND WE COULD CALL THE DEBT SQUARE...

"THERE'S A REAL GOOD REASON WHY I'VE ALWAYS BEEN DELIGHTED TO BE AN ONLY CHILD..."

YO--SIX-ONE-SIX--

--HELL BE HERE ANY MINUTE--SO YOU MIGHT WANT TO POLISH UP YOUR GEARBOX--OR WHATEVER...

IT IS MR. HAWKINS--?

SORRY, IRON THIGHS--GUY'S AN OLD COMBAT BUDDY OF MINE--

--JOHN STARKER--SOUNDED REAL CONCERNED ABOUT--

--'S A MATTER, SHORT CIRCUIT--YOU LOOK DISAPPOINTED--

DISAPPOINTED--!?!

YOU FLESH-DEVILS CONFUSE THE CURRENT OUT OF ME--

--FIRST YOU TREAT ME LIKE SOME CHROME STEEL NIGGER--FOR NOT HAVING HUMAN FEELINGS--

--THEN YOU ACCUSE ME OF DISAPPOINTMENT--?

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY, MR. STARKER--TRULY I AM--

BUT HANDS ARE TIED.

LAW IS A DIFFERENT SORT OF AFFAIR OUT HERE...

--WE DON'T RECOGNIZE ANIMALS AND ROBOTS AS CITIZENS OF ANY CLASS--LIKE YOU MUDBALLERS--

BUT--

AND FURTHERMORE--THIS--ILOA--HAS BEEN PASSED THROUGH AT LEAST FIVE DIFFERENT OWNERS--SINCE THE ORIGNAL THEFT--

KIDNAPPING--

WHATEVER--

--MORE IMPORTANT--

--IF COMMODORE TOMORROW--OR ANY ONE OF HIS PLANETEERS--

--FOUND I WAS IN ANY WAY INSTRUMENTAL IN ONE OF THESE QUESTIONABLE CASES...

--I'M A DEAD MAN.

LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT--

--I COME ALL THE WAY OUT HERE TO THE FRONTIER--REGISTER WITH THE LOCAL COPS--

--PLAYING COMPLETELY FAIR AND SQUARE--

--TO FIND OUT THE GENDARMERIE IS SO SCARED SHITLESS OF TOMORROW AND HIS THUGS--

--THAT I GOTTA GO NEGOTIATE WITH PIRATES--ALONE--WITH ABSOLUTELY NO BACKUP--?

"AH, YES--GORKY STATION--THE FIRST STOP ON THE LAST LEG OF THE JOURNEY TO THE STARS...

"...BUILT BY THE ONE-TIME SOVIET EMPIRE, SOMETIME IN THE MID-21st, THEN TAKEN OVER BY ITS CREW AS A FREE NATION...

"...FIRST THE SOVIETS FOUND THEY COULDN'T AFFORD THE EXPENSE OF CRUSHING THE REBELLION--

"--THEN THE REBELS FOUND THEY COULDN'T SUPPORT A REVOLUTION--

"--SO THEY SOLD OUT TO CORPORATE SPONSORS...SUCH IS THE LIFE OF A REVOLUTIONIST..."

I'M AFRAID SO, MR. STARKER--

--SHIP YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS UNREGISTERED IN TRIPLANET'S LISTINGS--

--SO SHE'S PROBABLY DOCKED ON INTERCONCOURSE 23B--

WHICH IS?

IT'S ABOUT A MILE DROP, RIGHT BELOW OUR FEET, TO BE PRECISE...

...TAKE THE FIRST CAR, JUST PAST THE SLEAZE ARCADE--

--PRESS THE BUTTON MARKED "PLUNGE"--

TELL ME SOMETHING--

--HOW COME ALL THIS ASSKISSING AND GENUFLECTION AT THE FEET OF UNCLE TOMMY?

I ALWAYS HEARD THIS WAS THE KNIGHTS OF THE GALAXY TURF--

YOU'VE BEEN AWAY FROM THE RIM FAR TOO LONG-- THOSE RED BASTARDS GOT RUN OUT OF HERE EIGHT, MAYBE NINE CYCLES AGO...

SO YOU GOT THE SPACE NAZIS RUNNING THINGS NOW, HUH...

A PIECE OF ADVICE, BUSTER-- I'D WATCH HOW YOU TALK--

TELL YOU WHAT, CHICKEN LIPS-- YOU WATCH FOR ME--

"ONCE THE CORPORATE GUYS HAD MOVED IN, IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE SLEAZE MERCHANTS GOT THEIR PIECE...

"...AND BEFORE YOU COULD SAY 'HEY, SAILOR' IT WAS OLD HOME WEEK AT GORKY STATION..."

YOU WERE QUITE RIGHT, WOOD--

pi'nng

THAT WHITE-HAIRED, POMPOUS CROCK OF SHIT REALLY DID BOOK PASSAGE HERE...

:snort...!

FROM WHAT I KNEW ABOUT THIS "MANHUNTER 2070" CHAR--

I KNOW-- BUT IT'S WHAT THEY CALL HIM ON THE VID--

--I'M AMAZED TO SEE HIM THIS FAR FROM THE BIG MUDBALL...

A MORE CONFIRMED INNER WORLDER DOESN'T BREATHE...

YOU THINK HE'S OUT TO EVEN A SCORE-

A SCORE...?

YOU MEAN-- WITH ME-- ?!?

HAR HAR WHEEZE SNORT!

OH, MY, MY-- THE ROMANTIC NATURE OF YOUTH...

NO, MR. WOOD- STARKER HAS NEVER HAD THE BALLS TO GO TOE-TO-TOE WITH ME--

-HE'S GOT NO MORE HEART THAN THOSE FILTHY MACHINES HE'S GOT THE HOTS FOR--

--NO- HE'S PROBABLY SO DOWN ON HIS LUCK, HE'LL TAKE ANY JOB THAT COMES ALONG-- HIS TICKET MANIFEST DID SAY "BUSINESS," AFTER ALL-

--BUT LET'S FOLLOW HIM, ANYWAY-- JUST FOR FUN-- hmmm--?

YEAH, YEAH, JOHN-- IT SURE IS A SMALL WORLD--

-IT'S STILL GOING TO COST YOU 500k MARKS/ CRYSTAL--

--IT'S WHAT I PAID--

YOU CAN'T BLAME ME FOR TRYING TO HONDLE--

YOU ALWAYS DID HAVE THE POKEREST FACE--

--FIRST TIME YOU SEE ME IN-- WHAT-- FIFTEEN YEARS-- AND I'VE BEEN DEAD FOR YEARS, ACCORDING TO WHAT I HEAR-

--YOU SWALLOW YOUR OWN SHOCK IN A SPLIT--

--AND YOU TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT AT SWINDLING ME.

SOME PEOPLE NEVER CHANGE--

--LOOK AT YOU...

RIGHT-- TIME FOR YOU TO BOOK-- JOHN--IT'S BEEN SWELL--

YOU SEEN TOMMY?

NOT SINCE I SAW YOU LAST--I HEARD HE'S THE BIG BOHOO IN THESE PARTS--

--THAT'S THE MAIN REASON I CAME IN HERE...

...NOW BEAT--

SO THINGS WITH THE METHUSELOIDS WEREN'T QUITE WHAT THE PAPERS SAID, HUH--?

I SAID, BEAT--

LET'S GO, ILDA-- I CAN ALWAYS TELL WHEN MY COMPANY'S NOT--

IF THAT WERE TRUE, YOU'D NEVER LEAVE HOME.

HOLY--!

HA!! GAVE YOU A SCARE, HUH, OLD PAL--!?!

"TALK ABOUT SMALL WORLDS..."

LONG WAY TO TRAVEL FOR SOME CHEAP ROBOT ASS...

YOU'RE IN MY WAY, TOMORROW...

AND...?

STARKER-- WE CAN WALK AROUND...

YOU LET HER CALL YOU-BY NAME--!?

JUST LIKE YOU USED TO LET ME, SOMETIMES, HUH, TOM...

HUH...?!

"SUFFICE IT TO SAY-- I'D'VE GIVEN MY EYETEETH TO HAVE BEEN A FLY ON THE WALL AT THAT MOMENT--"

"--JUST TO SEE THAT PSYCHOPATH TEETER ON THE BRINK OF A SEIZURE..."

GUUNHHH-- UCCCHH!

& BRENDA !?!

YOU'RE DEAD!!

"UNBELIEVABLE-- NO WONDER HE NEEDED ME TO MAKE HIM A LEGEND--IN HIS CONDITION, THIS IS THE BEST HE COULD DO...

ON THE CONTRARY, TOM-- I'M QUITE ALIVE AND KICK--

THIS MORE THAN MAKES UP FOR--

GO, STARKER-- NOBODY WOULD PAY A CENT FOR YOUR RANSOM--

BUT-- BUT LOOK AT YOU-- YOU'RE NOT A DAY OLDER THAN--

SHEKKA

BACK OFF, BUSTER-- AND STAY BACKED..

...I DON'T LOOK OR FEEL ANY OLDER--BUT YOU HAD ME DECLARED LEGALLY DEAD EIGHT YEARS AGO--

WHERE HANE YOU BEEN--I'VE MISSED YOU SO--

--I'VE NEVER STOPPED LOOKING FOR YOU--

ACCORDING TO THE BACK FILES IN THE LIBRARY HERE, YOU GAVE UP ABOUT FOURTEEN-AND-A-HALF YEARS AGO--

THE BABY--?

MISCARRIAGE--

--BUT I'VE GOT A GIFT FOR YOU--FOR YOUR FORTIETH BIRTHDAY...

...WHAT YOU ALWAYS WANTED... THAT'S WHY I CAME BACK...

"THE METHUSELOIDS WERE PRETTY *CONFIDENT* IN THEIR *UNDERSTANDING* OF *HUMAN* NATURE-

"THEY FIGURED SINCE THEY HAD THE *PREGNANT* MATE OF AN ENEMY OFFICER *HOSTAGE*, THEY WERE *SAFE* FROM HARM...

"--LIKE A *FOOL*, I *AGREED* WITH THEM.

"AS YOU *ATTACKED*, A HALF-DOZEN OF THEM HERDED *ME*-ALONG WITH BROOME AND FOX--"

"THEY'RE *ALIVE*-- LIKE--"

"I *HAVEN'T* TRAVELED THIS FAR TO BE *INTERRUPTED*-

"--LET ME *FINISH*...

"LIKE I SAY, THEY THEY GOT US ABOARD THIS *SMALL* HIGH-SPEED JUMPER--

"..AND WITH ALL THE *FIREPOWER* YOU AND YOURS WERE *THROWING*--

"..*NOBODY* SAW US TAKE OFF IN *HYPER-DRIVE* FOR THE *OUTER* PLANETS...

"...NOW, *REGARDLESS* OF WHAT YOU THOUGHT, THE METHUSELOIDS WERE *NO* RACE OF WARRIORS--

"--I MANAGED TO GET THE *COMMANDER* BY THE WINDPIPE--

"..A MELEE ENSUED-- HE SHOT FOX-- I STRANGLED *HIM*--

"--WHILE *BROOME* GRABBED HIS PISTOL, AND THE *TWO* OF US TOOK OVER THE JUMPER.

"IT TOOK US *FOREVER* TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO *PILOT* THE SHIP...

"..YOU KNOW *ME*-- AND BROOME COULD *BARELY* USE A ZIPPER...

"...AT *ANY* RATE, BY THE TIME WE FIGURED OUT THE *SHIP*, WE REALIZED WE WERE *MEGA*-BILLIONS OF MILES *AWAY* FROM THE *SYSTEM*--

"--AND *NEITHER* OF US *EVER* DID FIGURE OUT THE *HYPER-DRIVE*...

"...SO WE *FELL* INTO PIRACY QUITE BY *ACCIDENT*--PICKING UP A *CREW* AS WE WENT *ALONG*...

"THERE'S A *LOT* MORE *ACTION* OUT THERE THAN YOU'D *IMAGINE*-- LOTS MORE SPECIES.. *YOU'RE* GOING TO *HATE* IT...

"...BROOME DIED ABOUT *FIVE* YEARS AGO--

"--AND IT'S TAKEN ME *FIFTEEN* TO MAKE MY WAY BACK *HERE*...

"...TO DISCOVER HOW *WELL* YOU'D DONE FOR YOURSELF, TOM..."

"*FORGET* THE FLY ON THE WALL--

"--WHAT I WOULD'VE GIVEN FOR A BRAIN-SCAN OF OL' TOMMY RIGHT THERE--OH, BOY..!"

WELL ENOUGH, OF COURSE, FOR A WEAKLING MORTAL--WHO HAS NOT EVEN TASTED THE CELESTIAL WIND...

?!?!

HUSH, FRANCIS-- HE WAS MY HUSBAND ONCE, YOU KNOW...

ONCE, MY PET--A LONG TIME AGO...

AND DON'T FORGET HOW LONG AGO, TOMORROW-- SHE IS MINE NOW--!

"FIRST HE FINDS OUT HIS BIGGEST MOMENT IN THE SUN WAS ALSO WHEN HE FLUSHED AWAY HIS BIG SHOT AT REAL IMMORTALITY--"

FRANCIS-- YOU ARE BEING MORE THAN RUDE...

...LEAVE US NOW--

SHOOT AND YOU'RE DEAD BEFORE HE HITS THE GROUND...

"THEN TO FIND HIS LONG-LOST WIFE INVOLVED IN A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH AN APE--PUH-RICELESS!"

YOU COME BACK-- FROM THE GOD-DAMNED DEAD--WITH A GORILLA LOVER, NO LESS--

FRANCIS IS NO GORILLA--

STILL LOOKING LIKE THE GYRENE HOOCH POD PIN-UP GIRL I KNOCKED UP--

--THIS ISN'T ANY GIFT-- IT'S TORTURE...

DAMP IT DOWN, TOMMY--AND LISTEN--

--THEY WERE RIGHT ALL ALONG ABOUT THE METHUSELOIDS...

...BUT IT WASN'T SOME SECRET FORMULA--IT WAS EATING THE LITTLE CRITS.

NOW, YOU BE REAL NICE TO FRANCIS, AND HE'LL MAYBE GIVE YOU THE CROSS CO-ORDS OF THE LAST PLACE WE TRACKED THE REMAINDER OF THE LITTLE GUYS...

"AFTER ALL, FROM WHAT WE COULD READ OUT ON THEIR INFO DECK--

"--THERE AREN'T ENOUGH OF 'EM LEFT TO MAKE A RESPECTABLE TRIBE...

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY--I KNOW I HAVE AN INTERFACE FOR YOUR SPECIES-- BUT I SEEM TO HAVE MISPLACED IT--

IF YOU TWO WOULD HELP ME FIND THE FLOPPY SO WE COULD TALK TO THIS LITTLE BUGGER, WE MIGHT VERY WELL HAVE A BIGGER STORY THAN--

--HEY-- ARE YOU TWO EVEN LISTENING-?

PURVIS-- YOU ARE AN ABSOLUTE MORON-!

I MEAN, REALLY-- A WOODEN SPACE SHIP--!?!?

"OKAY-- I KNOW THESE DAYS WE TAKE ORGANIC SPACE TRAVEL FOR GRANTED-BUT THEN..."

FERIC GAVE ME A GREAT DEAL ON--

FERIC--!?! LORD IRONWOLF-- ??!

JESUS GOD-- FIRST YOU WHIP THE GUN AT SKEELING, THEN YOU LET HIM SELL YOU A CLUNKER LIKE--

PLEASE OFF-- MUCH TOO STATIC...

SSSCCRAARRR AREEEEEEEEEECCHHHH

REALLY, PURVIS--A WOODEN SPACE SHIP--?

SSSSCCRAARRRA

ZZZOOOOOM

WHAT WAS THAT, KAREL--!?!

THAT WAS THESE LITTLE GUYS AT LEAST TRYING TO COMMUNICATE WITH US--

--WHILE YOU TWO FOOLS ARGUE LIKE CHILDREN OVER THE DAMNED SHIP, FOR PITY'S SAKE--

I HEARD SOMETHING--

OF COURSE YOU HEARD SOMETHING-- THAT ALMIGHTY SQUAWK--

NO.. I HEARD A SHIP..

YEAH-- RIGHT-- IT'S PROBABLY IRONWOLF..

--WITH HIS MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE.

CAN HELPPP... HAVE U/ED //OOD =HIP=...

HAH--THESE LITTLE CHICKENS THINK THEY'RE GETTING NEAR--

SCHMUCK-- THESE LITTLE CHICKENS ARE METHUSELOIDS, I'M SURE OF IT-

YOU WERE THERE, HOMER--WHAT DO YOU THINK...?

I THINK PURVIS WAS A REAL DIPSHIT FOR BUYING A WOODEN SPACESHIP--

"OKAY-- WHEN I SAID I WAS OFTEN CHILDLIKE, BUT NEVER IMMATURE--I WAS A LITTLE OFF-"

IT'S AT THESE MOMENTS, HOMER--WHEN I SHOULD BE ABLE TO DEPEND ON YOU--THAT'S WHEN YOU ALWAYS LET ME DOWN...

OKAY, KAREL-- WHAT--?

THESE CHICKEN PEOPLE-- ARE THEY OR ARE THEY NOT METHUSELOIDS?

HMMM... WELLL...

...THEY COULD BE OF THE SAME RACE--BUT, UNDERSTAND--

-I NEVER GOT CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE FIRE LINE TO ACTUALLY SEE THE ENEMY--

HE NEVER GOT CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE FIRE LINE TO SEE THE FIRE LINE...

...BUT WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THAT TODAY, HOMER OLD BUDDY...

...ALL THREE OF YOU WILL BE SORELY MISSED--

--BUT THAT'S WHAT CROSSFIRE AND INNOCENT BYSTANDERS ARE FOR--

THA-THAT SOUNDS LIKE KILL SQUAD STUFF TO--

AND WHAT DID YOU *THINK* THE PLANETEERS WERE ALL *ABOUT*-- THE BOY SCOUTS--?

UNLIMBER THAT VORTEX *JAMMER*, SON--

--WE GON' KICK SOME *ALIEN* ASS--

AND *I'M* TELLING YOU BOTH-- *THIS* IS A BIGGER STORY THAN *ANYTHING* THE MUSEUM SENT US OUT HERE TO F--

CHRPUNNNDDDTT!!!

CHRPUNNNDDDTT!!!

CHRPUNNNDDDTT!!!

AMBUSH!

THE CHICKEN-SHITS *TRICKED*--

DON'T BE AN *ASSHOLE*--

--*THEY'RE* THE ONES BEING SHOT AT--!

COMRADE-- COMRADE--

--WE ARE *JOURNALISTS*--

--HOLD YOUR FIRE--!!

"SO MUCH FOR '*IMPERVIOUS*' RICK PURVIS-- THE *PUSSY*..."

KAREL-- STAY *AWAY* FROM THE METHUSELOIDS--

--GET *OUT* OF THE LINE OF FIRE--!

CHRPUNNDDDTT!!!

CHRPUNNDDDTT!!!

YOU THINK I'M JUST GOING TO GIVE UP THE *BIGGEST* STORY OF MY LIFE, YOU'RE *CRAZED*--!

DON'T WORRY--

THEY WON'T DARE HURT ME--

--I'M AN AMERICAN JOURNALI--

CHUNT CHUNT CHUNT CHUNT CHUNT CHUN

"WE ALL KNOW WHAT HAPPENED NEXT--

"--OR, AT LEAST, WE'VE ALL READ--

"--THE APPROVED VERSIONS...!"

COMMODORE TOMORROW-- THE SHIP IS BURN--

DO I GIVE A SHIT, WOOD?

IT'S THE METHUSE-LOIDS I WANT--

KAREL-- GET AWAY FROM THE CHICKENS--

--COVER ME, PURVIS--

-- I'M GOING AFTER--

SHE'S YOUR PROBLEM--

"LIKE I SAID-- A REAL PUSSY--

CHUNT CHUNT CHUNT CHUNT CHUNT CHU-

THAWHOOOOOSH

"THAT'S WHEN THE WOODEN SHIP EXPLODED-- IN A SHOWER OF CINDERS--"

"...AND THE METHUSELOIDS, CAUGHT IN A CASCADE OF SPARKS, *IGNITED*...

"...I WAS *ALWAYS* ONE OF *THOSE* KIDS-STARED *RIGHT* INTO THE SUN JUST *BECAUSE* MY MOTHER TOLD ME *NOT* TO...

"...OVER THE EXPLOSIVE DIN, I HEARD KAREL *SCREAM*--THE KEENING SHRIEK *BLENDING* WITH THE *MOANS* OF THE ALIENS...

"...SO I STARED RIGHT AT *KAREL*...

PA-THOOOM-PA-THOOOM-BOOOOOOOOOM!!

THA-BOOOOOOOOOM

"...TRANSFIXED AS HER DISINTEGRATING BODY ABSORBED THE DOZEN OR SO ALIEN CREATURES *CLOSEST* TO HER..."

"...IN THE MIDST OF THIS CHAOS, I HEARD THE *FAMILIAR* HUM OF THE ISHERWOOD 165...AND I *CHUCKLED* INVOLUNTARILY...

"...I *SUPPOSE* AT KAREL'S CONSUMMATE PROFESSIONALISM--

"...I CONTINUED TO STARE AS THE LIGHT *GREW*, RATHER THAN *ABATED*..."

"...KNOWING FULL *WELL* IT WAS THE *LAST* THING I'D *EVER* SEE...

"...PURVIS STUMBLED IN *FRONT* OF ME, TRYING *DESPERATELY* TO ESCAPE...

"...THE SHOCK WAVE KILLED HIM *INSTANTLY*.. AND *THAT'S* WHEN MY EYES *EXPLODED*.

"I HEARD KAREL'S HAND ON MY *SHOULDER*--AND FELT HER VOICE *COMFORTING* ME...

"...AND I HEARD THE *TOO* FAMILIAR VOICE OF THE MAN *RESPONSIBLE* FOR ALL THIS."

GOT 'EM...

DID YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENED TO THE *WOMAN*, WOOD?

I *DID*, SIR... *WHAT*..?

"NOW--THERE'S *LOTS* OF ARGUMENT AND DISCUSSION AS TO WHAT HAPPENED *NEXT*-- AND I *KNOW* HOW HARD IT IS FOR ACOLYTES AND BELIEVERS TO SEE THEIR MESSIAH IN *ANY* BUT A DIVINE LIGHT... BUT TAKE *MY* WORD FOR IT--

"--I WAS *THERE*..."

GRAB ONE, BOY--

--AND CHOW DOWN...!

"...AND, TO TELL THE TRUTH, IT SEEMED AN AWFULLY ANTICLIMACTIC ENTRANCE FOR A MESSIAH..."

BUT THE WOUNDED, SIR-- AND MS. SORENSEN--

-MS. SORENSEN...

...COMMODORE... MS. SORENSEN...

YOU BETTER GRAB ONE OF THESE WHILE YOU CAN..

CRI GGRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!!!!IPPP! SNAPPPPT!

COMMODORE...

I MEAN IT, WOOD--I'M NOT SURE HOW I'M GOING TO SHARE THIS LITTLE DISCOVERY WITH MY FELLOW MAN... SO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION...

CHOMPPCHOMP SLOP

CHOMPMPPG CNASHCHOMPCHEWCHEW SLURP

...THERE AIN'T NOBODY HERE BUT US CHIC--

--KENS.

Ka-Klikkkk!

NOT SO FAST, TOMORROW...

COMMODORE TOMORROW... PLEASE--

...BREATHE WRONG AND YOU'RE A DEAD MAN, TOM--NO SHIT.

YOU'RE QUITE A PIECE OF WORK, YOU ARE, TOM--

PUT THE GUN DOWN, HOMER OLD--

"SHE DENIES IT NOW--

"--BUT SHE TALKED TO ME, THEN..."

WOOD--KILL THIS CRIPPLED SON-OF-A-BITCH...

I'M SORRY, COMMODORE... BUT I CAN NO LONGER SERVE YOU...

...AS MY MISTRESS CALLS...

"DOESN'T DENY TALKING TO WOOD THOUGH... WOMEN..."

WHAT IS ALL THIS MUMBO-JUMBO--

YOU'RE JUST DESTINED TO FOREVER BE PRESENT AT THOSE FOCAL POINTS IN HISTORY, TOMMY...

...LIKE NOW, FOR INSTANCE...

COME ON, HOMER-- WHAT IS ALL THIS--?

WELL, TOMMY-- SIMPLY PUT--

YOU'RE GOING TO LIVE FOREVER--

--BUT KAREL GOT TO BE GOD...

"WE REACHED HOME THREE WEEKS LATER... HAVING DISCOVERED EN ROUTE THAT THE ISHERWOOD 165 HAD TRANSMITTED WHAT SOON CAME TO BE CALLED THE ASCENSION...

"...THROUGHOUT KNOWN SPACE..."

"...THE REST YOU KNOW... HOW A GENERATION-AND-A-HALF OF DISENCHANTED MEN AND NEOMEN RESPONDED WITH A RELIGIOUS FEROCITY TO A REAL WONDER SHOW...

"...AND FOUND THE MEANS TO CONQUER DEATH ITSELF."

WHAT'S THE MATTER, TOMMM-- YOU GOT WHAT YOU ALWAYS WANTED--

-I MEAN-- YOU WILL LIVE FOREVER-

BUT I WON'T BE ALONE...

"I'VE MENTIONED, IN MY OTHER WORK, A PENCHANT FOR THE OCCA-SIONAL EPIPHANY-- A MOMENTARY LIGHTBULB OVER MY HEAD...

"...SUCH WAS MY EXPERIENCE AT THAT MOMENT...

"...AS I REALIZED... THAT, AS SURE AS CHRISTIANITY WOULD NEVER HAVE HIT THE BIG TIME WITHOUT THAT BUCK-PASSING ROMAN, PONTIUS PILATE...

"KAREL AND HER FOLLOWERS OWED A GREAT DEAL OF THANKS..."

"...TO A BLIND MAN WITH A PISTOL..."

A BLIND MAN WITH A PISTOL...

WELL, WELL, WELL...

F'TATATITA... HERE F'TATATITA...

THAT'S RIGHT, SWEETIE...

MWRRRRRRRRRROOOOWWWRRRRRRRRRR!

pinng

SHKKKIIIZZZZZ

FOR GOD'S SAKE, HOMER-- THAT'S MY TAIL!!

THAT'LL TEACH YOU TO FUCK WITH ME, YOU RAT BASTARD..,

MMMMRRRRRRRRROWWW

NEXT LORDS OF THE LONG SHADOW

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